



U.S. EMBASSY - BAGHDAD

2008 Provincial Reconstruction Team News

-94th Engineer Battalion Makes a Difference for Iraq's Cultural History-

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Using the latest high-tech land surveying equipment and relying on their engineer expertise, the 156th Survey and Design Team, 94th Engineer Battalion, mapped out the grounds of Saint Elijah's Monastery for a mission far from the ordinary. These was part of the latest in continuing efforts to upkeep and restore this ancient ruin for the preservation of Iraq's multifaceted religious history.

On 7 July 2008, CPT Heather Sprowls (94th Construction Officer) led the 156th as they surveyed the area know as Saint Elijah's Monastery.

Saint Elijah's Monastery is over 1500 years old. Founded in 599 AD by Chaldean/Assyrian Catholic monks, this religious haven has seen its share of destruction, restoration, and wars (to include WWII). In 2003, during the invasion of Iraq, it suffered some structural damage. Today, located on FOB Marez (south of Mosul, Iraq), the site is under constant observation and is no longer in immediate danger of harm. There are even scheduled tours of the grounds, given by the Chaplain's office, the primary caretakers of this sacred site. The Chaplain's tours offer to broaden peoples' understanding of the rich history and culture of Iraq and its people, plus it gives Soldiers and military contractors a welcome break from the action.

Originally the University of Mosul was scheduled to survey the site, but because of the volatility of the political situation the 94th Engineer Battalion's own 156th detachment was tapped. Their expertise is highly valued and sought after and the data collected from their survey will be used in Army and civilian maps detailing the area of the monastery. It will also be used in future archeological excavations and expeditions to determine if and/or how much the land has shifted, moved, or the geography has changed. Plus, it will answer many questions that still remain about this mysterious structure that was used by generations of Iraqis in the region for not only religious purposes, but military purposes. For example, the 156th also created a 3-D model of the site based on their survey data for scientists to analyze and extrapolate the possible purpose of crumbling rooms based on their spatial relations.



PFC Wilbert Williams (left) and SPC Joong Chung using "Total Station 5600" to survey the grounds of St. Elijah's Monastery, the oldest in Iraq.

When asked how she felt about her part in the survey, CPT Sprowls said, “It was something that we had not done before. It’s very interesting to do something for historical purposes. Our information will help provide others data to keep or improve the condition of the monastery. It’s also a great honor to be asked to participate in conserving part of Iraq’s rich cultural heritage.”